



CHANGES 1990

Seen as a sixties fad by establishment hacks, Underground comix have proven their staying power. A few of the original companies have dropped out of the game, but the majors: Last Gasp, Rip Off Press, and Kitchen Sink remain and the album concept which Harvey Kurtzman was promoting at conventions several years ago was assimilated and used effectively by both over and underground publishers during the eighties. Surprisingly, Fantagraphics, a company that grew out of a journal devoted to nostalgia has become a major publisher of underground anthologies, producing collections of Spain's TRASHMAN and the early work of Kim Deitch [BEYOND THE PALE] as well as THE COMPLETE CRUMB series which is in its 4th volume at this writing. It's nice to see these books coming out, particularly for those of us who research comix history. It is a lot handier to take a book off a shelf than to dig a comic book out of a bagged collection. These anthologies are well printed on good quality paper, and the patient reader now has the option to wait for the book just as he may wait for the paperback version of a hardback novel. No doubt, the dedicated collector buys both.

Comic book prices have gone up along with everything else and most of the undergrounds sold for \$1.75-\$3.50 during the late eighties, cheap compared to the prices many of the 50-cent first editions now command on the collectors' market. The albums sell for \$8.95-\$14.95 with the hardcover editions going for twice that amount. Signed editions of various volumes of THE COMPLETE CRUMB sold around Berkeley for \$35-50.00. Due to the death of Marty Pahlis, Crumb began writing his own autobiography via the introduction to volume 4, so it is likely this volume will cost a small fortune in the future. All of this is interesting because of what it says about the concept of people's comix which Crumb was promoting when he started ZAP back in 1967. The underclass, the regular people, have long been priced out of this market; most can barely afford the latest Archie off the rack at a 7-11. More and more comics, over and underground are coming out in deluxe editions that sell for \$3.95 and more (DC's recent KILLING JOKE, the new DEADMAN series, etc).

I mention KILLING JOKE and DEADMAN, because these two books link directly with neo-EC trends in early seventies undergrounds like SKULL, SLOW DEATH FUNNIES, FANTAGOR, and PSYCHOTIC ADVENTURES ILLUSTRATED. These neo-ECs with their emphasis on violence, bizarre sex, gore, mutilation, and all kinds of slasher horror opened the door closed by the Comics Code of 1954. After waiting awhile to see what would happen, companies like Marvel and DC rushed in. The Code was effectively throw out the window and the eighties became a decade of comic books filled with sadomasochism and psycho-sexuality, some of it tongue in cheek (Chaykin's AMERICAN FLAGG), but a lot of it deadly serious (Alan Moore's WATCHMEN series and his KILLING JOKE).

Consider the moral shift of the eighties. Women's bare buns became socially acceptable on beaches, in tv commercials for soft drinks and other products, on MTV, on Dance Fever and television shows in general, as background cheesecake on MIAMI VICE and other cop shows like B. J. STRYKER, all of this made possible less by men's mags like PLAYBOY and PENTHOUSE than by bathing suit and underwear fashion styles promulgated first in France and Italy then imported to the heartland of America via the New York fashion industry. It is now okay for a woman to walk around in public with her ass showing. Compare the comic heroines of the forties with those of the present to see the shift. Look at the difference between the costumes of PHANTOM LADY and and of the contemporary characters used as cover figures by Dave Stevens and Bill Stout. Whether or not the morality of a period can be determined by the length of women's skirts and the amount of their skin that is showing is up to you to decide; in any case it is clear that the advertising industry has succeeded in associating bare skin with products like Special K and Slice, and subliminal sex and death images are still predominant in most of the products we see on national television everyday.

Language has changed significantly. What used to be dirty words are now so common that most of them are heard on HBO and other cable stations with no public complaints. Lenny Bruce was arrested many times circa 1965 for

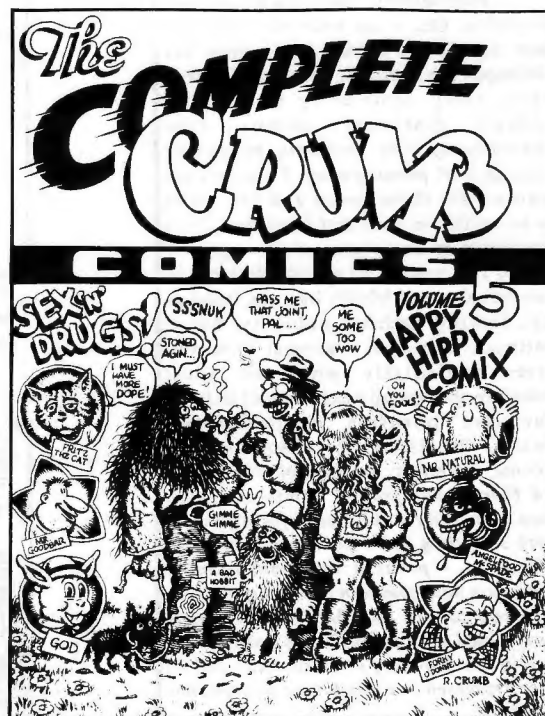
saying certain words onstage during his act. The same words are now heard on HBO in Eddie Murphy's special RAW, words common in thrillers like THE TERMINATOR, ROBOCOP, and LETHAL WEAPON. Most hypocritical are the media people and their guests who say F-word instead of fuck when everyone knows very well what they mean. They certainly aren't keeping anything from the kids. I hope they don't imagine a film like BEVERLY HILLS COP was made for adults. Language in the comic books has changed accordingly and it is the norm to hear certain characters say "Shit," etc., almost as often as the word is heard on rap tapes. Nor are the words limited to underground comix as they were circa 1972 when Richard Corben and Jaxon were putting contemporary jargon into the mouths of barbarians; in the eighties one found more than one superhero saying shit, damn, hell, and worse.

Talk shows have exploited every sexual aberration known to humankind. Guests through the eighties have been: transsexuals, transvestites, rapists, parents of murdered children, parents who have murdered their children, incest victims and offenders, child-abusers and abused children; indeed, the eighties was an era of sensationally exposed crime, a period when the criminal made great progress toward becoming a celebrity. Donahue blazed the trail and Oprah Winfrey, Geraldo Rivera, Joan Rivers, and Morton Downey, Jr., followed in his wake.

COMIX WAVE 85. March, 1990.

UNDERGROUND COMIX SHOW

A retrospective of underground comic art is being held at the San Francisco Museum of Cartoon Art, 665 Third Street, San Francisco, California. This show will continue through April and features original work by Spain, Bill Griffith, and many others.



Tolerance of sound levels have changed radically since the days of acid rock music when the decibal level began to creep upward. Today's teenager can ride around in a car equipped with a stereo system that makes it a mobile ghetto blaster. These boom box cars are not stopped for disturbing the peace, though just a few years ago such sound levels would have triggered a visit by the cops. I've often asked myself what this cacaphony means. Loud became a value in the eighties, demanded for its own sake. Softness was the threat, the sound of a parent or teacher saying *turn it down*. Silence was nothingness instead of tranquility. My mother sleeps with the radio or tv on all night as do many of the ladies in her condo. My aunt has her tv on all the time. Visitors come and go, but tv is forever, the endless company of manufactured celebrities. Television made the difference between capitalism and communism, because American television is able to create the illusion of plenty though a fifth of the population is disenfranchised, unemployed, living on the edge of poverty. America, with a trillion dollar national debt, can make the rest of the world think that everyone living here drives a beautiful sportscar and has a private swimming pool.



Pornography has become socially acceptable. Oh, I can hear the folks out there say it isn't true, but when sex videotapes are available for sale or rent in nearly every community in America through National chains like Wherehouse, this amounts to public acceptance of pornography. Pornstars are frequent talk show guests and I've yet to see an audience walk out in protest. This amounts to an acceptance of pornography as well. The movement against Violence in Pornography and Media has not fared as well, lacking national publicity, but it continues to mount a protest here and there, particularly when an adult bookstore springs up near a school or in an otherwise pornfree neighborhood. Clearly, the issue of censorship has become academic. In spite of a bust here and there, underground comix and porn films and other public manifestations of overt sexuality have not been suppressed; indeed, as I pointed out, underground themes are now common in what used to be children's comics like BATMAN. Outrage is expressed as a joke. It was nothing but parody on Downey's show and still is when expressed in a mock tone by Donahue or Rivera.



COMIX PLUGOLA

A computer made mini from Ken Greene. LET A SNEER BE YOUR UMBRELLA. 50¢/stamp from him at 468 Anita Dr., Millbrae, CA 94030.

MONKS ON THE ROAD. 50¢/stamp from Mick Cusimano, POB 2565.

SHORTOONZ 3. 50¢/stamp from Dan Taylor, 1833 Guntle Rd., New Lebanon, OH 45345.

PAPER DREAMS 1. 75¢ pp from Paul Tumey and James Gill, HSC, 4841 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741-9631.

STUPID 1 is a nice little micromini from J. P. Crangle, Box 22, Syracuse, NY 13215. 50¢/stamp. Ask for his HOLIDAY FUNNIES. Same price.

CHICKEN SLACKS 4. DZ. \$3.75 pp. Mary Fleener, 309 Oceanview Ave., Encinitas, CA 92024. Mary's going SLUTBURGER for Rip Off Press.

Sample copy of THE COMICIST for \$1.45 from Rocket Graphics, 1112 Bellwood Dr., Loveland, OH 45140. Nice small press review zine.

SUCK BLOOD, a graphic novel re vampires. Info from POB 111305, Memphis, TN 38111-1305.

EL VIBORA 117 is \$8 pp from J.M. Berenguer, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.

We're getting over the Earthquake. Sorry to be late this time. Next mailing at the end of February. Plugs are still two copies.



HUP 3. © R. Crumb, 1990.

HUP HUP HUP HUP HUP HUP

Crumb has a penchant for titillating the anal-sadistic misogynist reader as he simultaneously backlashes the feminist prude. In the third issue of his solo title, HUP, he leaps from infantilism across the abyss of existentialism and makes his way through a rather tedious anti-Trump diatribe to wind up deflating a bourgeois Flakey Foont's wimpy adulation of corrupt old Mr. Natural's flagrant misogyny. Crumb is to comics what Philip Roth was to popular literature in the sixties, the endless confessor, a reluctant celebrity who endlessly celebrates the cult of the self by drawing and redrawing his own aberrant sexual fantasies. In HUP, Crumb's nostalgia is personal, a 46-year-old father's passion for a young maid. Here is Robert Crumb, comicdom's best-known unknown, the man who has made a career out of making his privates public, keeping on keeping on. Is there any detail of Crumb's life that isn't known to the public? Isn't Crumb drifting into parody of parody as he re-draws sexual routines from twenty years past? I found his graphic explication du texte more boring than Sartre's pre-WW2 *La Nausée*. Seems Crumb is now taking seriously what he was making fun of back in FRITZ THE CAT. Is there a contemporary Crumb? Does he know that George Bush is President? Does he see Communism crumbling in Europe? Is he aware of neo-colonialism in Africa and South America? Has Crumb become an intellectual isolate?

To me existentialism, particularly the atheistic brand adopted by Sartre, was a philosophy which enabled a postwar world to distance itself from the horrors of Auschwitz and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I find any nostalgia for this mode curious.

